Diese Website verwendet Cookies von Google, um Dienste anzubieten und den Traffic zu analysieren. Deine IP-Adresse und dein User-Agent werden zusammen mit Messwerten zur Leistung und Sicherheit für Google freigegeben. So können Nutzungsstatistiken generiert, Missbrauchsfälle erkannt und behoben und die Qualität des Dienstes gewährleistet werden.

WEITERE INFORMATIONEN OK

Thursday, February 23, 2017

Conflict and collectibles among the Yurok

Until about 11,000 years ago all humans were foragers, living by hunting, gathering, or fishing. To study human evolution, and in particular the interest of this author, the long evolution of collectibles -- non-fungible treasure and fungible money -- we must try to reconstruct the nature of our ancestral forager cultures. The ancestors of the vast majority of currently living people lived in areas that, due to their relative ecological abundance, have for centuries or millennia since been given over to agriculture.

One possible way gather evidence about our ancestral cultures is to study what small fraction of their artifacts have been preserved by time and dug up by archaeologists. Fortunately one of the desirable features of collectibles is their durability, so that a disproportionate number of such artifacts survive. Another way is to study recent observations that travelers, missionaries, ethnologists, colonial officials, traders, and the natives themselves made and recorded about forager cultures that existed in recent times (albeit not ancestral to the vast majority of today's humans, but "cousins"), before these cultures were too severely disrupted by the many global waves of disease and migration since Columbus.

With extremely few exceptions, forager cultures either did not undergo long-term recorded observation by ethnologists before severe disruption to their native institutions (e.g. most indigenous American tribes, Andaman Islanders, Ainu, west coast Australian aborigines), or lived in nutrient-poor wastelands beyond the main streams of human evolution (Kalahari desert, Australian outback, Arctic, American and Canadian Plains, etc.), living in cultures far more dispersed and mobile than is likely for the forager ancestors of most current humans. Some may have been young refugee cultures fleeing the effects of the Columbian Exchange (for example, the Pirahã may have lost some important language features common to practically all other human languages).

By the time of Columbus, the Americas were the only continents with foraging cultures living in rich ecosystems – all other rich ecosystems had been converted to agriculture (as had many, but far from all, in the Americas). Most American foragers were soon disrupted beyond recognition by the massive waves of post-Columbian diseases and immigration. The Yurok

About Me

Nick Szabo

"A premier thinker about history, law and economics, and the lessons they have for security." -- Adam Shostack, Emergent Chaos

"Szabo comes out with these essays that leave me in awe." -- Brian Dunbar

"Reading material that is eclectic, challenging and endlessly fascinating." -- Sean McGrath, Propylon

"Like most blogs worth my attention, this blog is updated only infrequently. That is because the authors of blogs worth my attention only post when they have something to say that is true, relevant and not already known by their audience. Most of the human race does not have the skill to know when an idea has these three properties. The skill is particularly rare in the fields of politics and economics, which is why this blog is such a rare and valuable thing." -- Richard Hollerith

View my complete profile

was a group of indigenous American foragers with shared language and customs. They lived in a rich dense ecosystem, yet furthest away from these biological and cultural tsunamis that had overwhelmed the rest of the post-Columbian Americas. The unique position of the Yurok and some of its neighboring language groups, especially the Hupa, and Karok or Karuk, (who occupied areas further up the Klamath River), and the Tolowa (who occupied the coast further northern into Oregon and the lowest reaches of the Rogue River) can be visualized by comparing the Yuroks' territories (their population lived almost entirely within a few miles of the Pacific Coast and the lower Klamath River) at the end of the 19th century to the growing American railroad network. The Pacific Northwest tribes more famous to anthropology had already been severely disrupted by the time they were studied by ethnologists. With no ongoing contacts with white immigrants until 1849, the Yurok and Hupa did not experience substantial disruption "until much later than other tribal groups in California and the United States". Ethnologists such as Goddard and Kroeber were able to interview Yurok and Hupa people who had living memories of a minimally disturbed forager culture, including some who still practiced much of the lifestyle.

Railroads (red) within c. 300 miles of the Pacific coast of the United States in 1890, vs. the extent of the Yurok tribe (blue) at that time. The Yurok were among the last tribes in the rich ecosystems of the American Pacific coast to succumb to the overwhelming influences of Western immigration. As a result, recorded observations of the Yurok are almost the only ones we have of a forager people in a rich ecosystem in a nearly undisturbed and long-term equilibrium state.

The Pacific Coast of North America features uneven seasonal rain patterns that make it difficult to support early forms of agriculture. Thus, even in nutrient-dense environments such as those populated by the Yurok , this region was dominated by forager groups.

Even though the Yurok didn't have agriculture they did have permanent settlements due to the rich salmon fishing on the Klamath River. When they finally encountered the post-Columbian wave of disease, immigration, and modernity in the mid 19th century (possibly also encountering some of the waves of disease that hit the Pacific Coast as early as the 18th

Blog Archive

- ► 2018 (1)
- ▼ 2017 (3)
  - ► March (1)
  - ▼ February (2)
    - Conflict and collectibles among the Yurok
    - Money, blockchains, and social scalability
- ► 2016 (4)
- ► 2015 (3)
- ► 2014 (3)
- ► 2013 (3)
- ► 2012 (8)
- ► 2011 (12)
- ► 2010 (9)
- ► 2009 (29)
- ► 2008 (55)
- ► 2007 (47)
- ► 2006 (130)
- ► 2005 (44)

century), almost every technology the Yurok and their indigenous neighbors had could probably have been encountered in similar form along many Eurasian coasts before the dawn of agriculture over ten thousand years ago, and perhaps even twenty or more thousand years ago. Yurok was one of the very few such cultures, quite possibly similar to cultures that existed as long as tens of thousands of years ago, whose old customs were observed and recorded before they converted to modern law, money, and technology.

The closest 19th century railroad to the Yurok was hundreds of miles away, in contrast to the more famous tribes of the Pacific Northwest, which were much more disrupted by immigrants and their new laws before their customs were carefully observed and recorded. The Yurok were one of the very few forager cultures living in an abundant ecosystem, yet observed within recent memory of a probably largely undisturbed long-term equilibrium cultural state, and the recorded observations of this culture will almost surely remain among the very few such records.

The Yurok lived in permanent but very small villages. In 1900 their population was probably (per Kroeber) around 2,500 people living in over 50 such villages: a handful of families per hamlet. This represented a population substantially reduced by immigrant-introduced disease. Since this is estimated to have killed off 75% of the Yurok population in the second half of the nineteenth century – compared to the 95% death rate of other indigenous Californians -- the original population may have been around 10,000.

The plurality of the Yurok diet was salmon; they also caught steelhead trout, lamprey eel, sturgeon, and candlefish on the lower Klamath River. Yurok also gathered acorns and shellfish and hunted large game (elk, deer, and sea lion). Salmon were caught by nets, and during the height of salmon migration in temporary weirs. They were finished off with long spears.

> The aboriginal territory of the Yurok people encompassed riparian lands along the lower forty miles of the Klamath River, from its confluence with the Trinity River, its major tributary, to the Pacific Ocean. It also included coastal lands from a few miles north of the river's month south to Trinidad. … The river was their world. North, south, east, and west did not exist for them. The only directions were upriver or downriver. [Lufkin]

Lacking animals or vehicles to ride, the Yurok often walked. But their main way to travel long distance was by canoe, in both ocean-going and river-borne forms. The two most strategic locations for the Yurok were Welkwaw, at the mouth of Klamath River, and Qu'nek, at the convergence of the Klamath and Trinity rivers.

What the Yurok could not eat during the spring and fall salmon migrations they preserved by open-pit smoking. Food and other goods were stored in the many baskets weaved by Yurok women. Salmon smoking, combined with the other abundant food sources of the lower Klamath River and ocean environments, made their diet reliable year-round, despite the boom-or-bust nature of the salmon migrations, and let them settle in permanent and relatively dense habitations, in contrast to inland foragers, recently surviving examples of which lived in far sparser populations and generally moved once to several times per year to follow game.

The Yurok had no state, government officials, chiefs, or even clan heads. Among the highest income earners were shamans, usually elderly females, a role that might be best described in modern cultural terms as combining the role of priest with that of medical doctor. On the other hand, most important property was owned by and most important wealth transfers decide by individual adult males, generally not by females, no matter their earnings, nor by groups. These individuals sometimes owned fractional shares in some kinds of economic property, for example in customarily defined spots for salmon fishing.

Inheritances, and the minority of claims that were not simply individual, were distributed among variable groups of males defined by their kin distances to the deceased or the bride. There were no fixed kin groups; instead "a group of kinsmen shades out … and integrates with others." (Kroeber p392). Exogamy and endogamy were also defined this way, with respect to the variable group that was one's particular relative kin, rather than with respect to fixed villages, clans, or any other such groups sometimes found in other forager cultures.

Forager societies in general, and indigenous Californian societies in particular, were usually quite violent, particularly where populations were more dense. Next only to environmental nutrient density, violence was probably the main barrier to social scalability among foragers. Reducing and mitigating this violence so as to allow family and economic institutions to work was a predominant function of indigenous social institutions. Violence took every form from one-on-one to small-scale, gang-like wars, typically between small kin groups.

A leaderless and policeless social order like that of the Yurok depended more on custom and supernatural sanctions than modern legal systems do. Yurok law contained a multitude of specific and negative taboos. The common expectation that all sides should follow customary rules and, where appropriate, customary property valuations and exchange rates, reduced negotiations and arguments, and thus reduced disputes, and thus reduced the violence that was often engendered by disputes. "Both marriage and [injury compensation] were definite, commercial, negotiated transactions ; all property possessed a value fixed by custom, or by previous changes of ownership, but negotiations were a cause of much dispute, each side claiming as much as it dared, and usually ending in compromise." (Quiggins p296)

The following kin had priority for inheritance of the largest pieces of property:

1. sons, but if none
2. brothers, but if none
3. brothers' sons

Property rights included incorporeal property, often bundled with corporeal property. For example dance outfits, often made at great labor out of deer-skin and rare woodpecker scalps, demonstrating wealth as splendor and usually passed on as heirlooms, always came bundled with prayers and spells that only the owner of a particular dance outfit could use.

"[E]very invasion of privilege or property must be explicitly compensated". Compensation usually arrived at by "negotiation of the interested parties and their representatives, and by them alone" – no chiefs etc., just strong custom and

respect for agreements. “Revenge causes two liabilities [to be compensated in money and treasure] where one lay before.” (Kroeber p390-2).

For the purposes of customary exchanges, bridewealth, and compensation for injuries, the value of property was “either fixed by custom, or can be valued by consideration of payments made for it in previous changes of ownership.” (Kroeber p392) Yurok law was “almost fully resolvable into claims for property”. When faced with a judgment or agreement ending a vendetta, if a defendant could not cough up the specified value in property, generally in the form of *dentalia* money and non-fungible treasure, he or she became a slave of the plaintiff (the victim or a deceased victim’s next-of-kin).

Such debt slavery was the only way a slave could be created among the Yurok, since they took no male prisoners in the small-scale, gang-like warfare in which ad-hoc kin groups and allies sometimes engaged when disputes remained unsettled. They either adopted or returned the women and children prisoners as part of peace-making settlement (which indeed was not qualitatively distinguished from the settling of smaller instances of violence).

If a defendant in a dispute refused to either pay the agreed or adjudged compensation or submit to debt slavery, vendetta remained. The main outcomes of disputes were either continued violence, debt slavery, or (the most usual case) a final transfer of wealth that sufficiently satisfied the disputants, their kin groups, and third parties to bring an end to vendetta.

Yurok law was “almost fully resolvable into claims for property” (Kroeber 1925). If a defendant could not pay, he or she became a slave of the defendant or of a deceased defendant’s next-of-kin.

The Yurok had at least two common kinds of procedures for settling disputes. The first was direct negotiations between the disputants, usually including kin or allies. The second was a procedure whereby each side picked two jurors, who also acted as intermediaries between the two parties, who would not meet. The first method was more dangerous, as arguments often escalated into violence.:

> Among the Yurok…as typical among less specifically organized people, the ‘court’ was less definite, but it was nevertheless there. An aggrieved Yurok who felt he had a legitimate claim engaged the legal services of two nonrelatives from a community other than his own. The defendant then did likewise. These men were called ‘crossers’; they crossed back and forth between the litigants. The principals to the dispute ordinarily did not face each other during the course of the action. After hearing all that each side had to offer in evidence and pleading as to the relevant substantive law, the crossers rendered a decision for damages according to a well-established scale that was known to all. For their footwork and efforts each [crosser] received a piece of shell currency called a ‘moccasin’. (Hoebel p25, citing Kroeber, ‘Yurok Law’, *22nd Intl. Congress of Americanists*, 1924, p 551).

Dentalia (*terk-term* in the Yurok language) was a fungible form of collectible – essentially money, and called such both by early Western observers and by the Yurok themselves when they translated their language into English. Most of the economic and legal functions of *dentalia* shells had been by

th

FIG. 129.—*Dentalium* shell-money, California

(Quiggin p294)

the 20 century either take over by dollars or obsoleted by the move to the Western legal system and the abolition of shamans and bridewealth.

Dentalia shells were counted individually or in groups of five. The value of a *dentalium* shell was judged by its length, longer shells being disproportionately rarer. The length of *dentalia* shells judged with respect to length between finger creases, or by tattoos which themselves had been made by shells of standard length. (p396). The technique was the same among the neighboring Hupa:

> As all hands and arms are not of the same length it was necessary for the man on reaching maturity to establish the values of the creases on his hand by comparison with money of known length. He had a set of lines tattooed on the inside of the forearm. These lines indicated the length of 5 shells of the several standards. This was the principal means of estimating money. The first 5 on the string were measured by holding the tip of the first shell at the thumbnail and drawing the string along the arm and noting the tattooed mark reached by the butt of the fifth shell (Goddard, 1903, p. 446).

Mr. McCann [a Hupa, a language group upstream of the Yurok, with many similar customs] "measuring dentalium *shell money against tattoo marks on his forearm. Photograph by Pliny E. Goddard, Hoopa, Humboldt County, 1901 (15-2947)." Credit: Hearst Museum Berkeley. [Source]*

Collectibles served as money (fungible, divisible, and transferable wealth) or as treasure (displayable and transferable wealth). The chief collectibles of the Yurok were:

A splendid headdress featuring woodpecker scalps, from the nearby Tolowa people, 1924. [Source]

- Size-ranked *dentalia* constituted the most common media for satisfying obligations, a standard counter-performance for exchanges, and as a standard of value for determining the total value of a wealth transfer, usually from custom, sometimes by negotiation, or a combination thereof, for a given situation. *Dentalia* made up a substantial part of nearly all, but usually less than half of most, of the value of the largest wealth transfers (shaman or doctor fees, injury compensation, and bridewealth).

- Woodpecker scalps came in two sizes, exchanged at a 6:1 ratio. Besides a store of value they were used to add splendor to dance headdresses and regalia.

- Deerskins (used in dances; the very rare albino pelt was quite valuable)
- Large blades of obsidian or flint (the larger ones, either by being rarer or harder to make, could be quite valuable)

Yurok or Karuk obsidian treasure blades displayed at the Denver Art Museum. The Yurok and their neighbors, like most other indigenous American tribes, used obsidian in practical axes, knives, and arrowheads. But they also knapped blades out of rare large pieces of obsidian and used them for wealth transfer and ceremonial display [Source]

Hupa in dance regalia made out of albino deerskin, which was very rare, and thus valuable as a collectible. [Source]. Ethnographers themselves followed the collecting instinct: most ethnographic evidence was selected in favor of the rare and alien and against the regular and normal.

An unsettled vendetta could result in a disproportionate response leading to war. Yurok customary law made "no distinction … between murder and war." (Kroeber p420). War deaths and murder were settled by the same injury

compensation rules (blood money). Yurok peace settlements involved the same settlement dances and kinds of wealth transfer (albeit usually on a larger scale) as individual homicide cases,. They did not include tribute, which meant the victors often had to pay more compensation than the vanquished. Krober recounts one such war (p422):

> "A feud of some note took place between [the villages of] Sregon and Ko'otep. When the leading man [richest man and leader of this war party – not a permanent official] lost his brother by sickness, he accused an inhabitant of [one of the small villages of] Wohtek or Wohkero of having poisoned him. The suspect was soon killed from ambush. After this a Sregon man was attacked and killed at Ko'otep, which is only a short distance from Wohtek. The act involved the people of Ko'otep, which was at that time a large village. After a time, settlement was proposed, and the two parties met at an open place below Sregon to conclude the negotiations. Each side was ready to make a customary [settlement] dance, when some one fired a shot. In the fight that ensued, a [village of] Meta ally of the Sregon people was killed. The headman of Sregon now went down river with his friends and lay in wait at an overhanging and bush bank near Serper, where the current takes boats close in to shore. When a canoe of his foes came up, he attacked it and killed four of the inmates. The feud went on for some time. Sregon, never a large village, fought, with only some aid from Meta, against Ko'otep, Wohtek, and Pekwan, but lost only 3 men to 10 of their opponents'. The headman at Sregon was sufficiently wealthy, when settlement came, to pay for all the satisfaction he had earned [i.e. the blood money for the 11 men killed by his side]. He once said with reference to this experience in this and other feuds, that open battles often took place without anyone being killed. Somehow men are hard to hit, he philosophized: arrows have a way of flying past a human being when a hunter is sure to strike a deer at the same distance…." (Kroeber p422)

Hupa arrows for fighting and hunting [Source]

Because *dentalia* was the main way to avoid violence and enslavement, win the best bride, and pay for spiritual and medical services, the Yurok in consequence had a strong desire to acquire *dentalia:*

> They are firmly convinced that persistent thinking about money will bring it. Particularly is this believed to be true while one is engaged in any sweat-house occupation. Asaman climbs the hill to gather sweat-house wood always a meritorious practice, ... he puts his mind on *dentalia*. He makes himself see them along the trail or hanging from fir trees eating the leaves. ... In the sweat-house he looks until he sees more money-shells perhaps peering at him through the door. When he goes down to the river he stares into it and at last may discern a shell as large as a salmon, with gills Working like those of a fish. . . . Saying a thing with sufficient intensity and frequency was a means towards bringing it about. A man often kept calling ' I want to be rich ' or ' I wish *dentalia* ' perhaps weeping at the same time…(Kroeber 1925, p 41)

Tolowa man measuring a dentalia *shell string "thumb to shoulder". [Source]*

Length of shell (estimated by length between finger creases or tattoo marks that had been measured from standard shells; translated into English inches)	*Shells to a string of "thumb to shoulder" length (about 27 and ½ inches)*	*Rough typical value of shell in c. 2010s U.S. dollars, based on c. 1900 dollar value in trade with white immigrants and internal exchange after incorporation of U.S. money*
2 ½	*11*	*$150*
2 5/16	*12*	*$90*
2 1/8	*13*	*$30*
2	*14*	*$15*
1 7/8	*15*	*$7.50*

The *dentalia* used by the Yurok and neighboring tribes came via repeated transfers from distant parts north. *Dentalia* are found on the Pacific Coast above the 49th parallel. In the waters off the Vancouver and Queen Charlotte Islands, indigenous peoples dredged live shells from a sea bottom tens of feet below the surface. "They let down long poles to which are attached pieces of wood fitted with spikes or teeth, between which the shells become fixed." Shells harvested live

have, even many decades after having been killed, a different color than the dead *dentalia* shells that commonly wash up on many Pacific Coast beaches. The former were valued as scarce collectibles; the latter were not, and were not used by the Yurok or their neighbors. (Quiggins, p293-4)

Dentalia *shell string and Northern California elk antler purse for holding it. Probably Hupa. 1800s. [Source]*

Yurok cosmology – their view of the shape and size of the universe -- was largely bounded by their personal experience and defined by the topology of the Pacific Coast and the flow of the lower Klamath River and its immediate tributaries. *Dentalia* were obtained from transfers down the Pacific Coast, from tribes further north, including trade in various treasures and slaves with some Pacific Northwest tribes. “They speak in their traditions of … strange but enviable peoples … who suck the flesh out of the [*dentalia*] univalves.” (Kroeber p394) As *dentalia* percolated down the coast, their scarcity rose and their exchange rate strengthened. “In Northern Oregon or among the Yurok a slave was worth 1 string. Among the Nootka [who harvested the live *dentalia* off Vancouver Island], it took 5 fathoms to buy a slave.” (Einzig p173).

Primary (net) directions of dentalia *shell transfers along the two topological axes of the Yurok: south along the Pacific coast and up the Klamath River system. The source of* dentalia *used by the Yurok as a fungible media for the satisfaction of obligations was far from local; the main source was probably the Vancouver Islands in British Columbia. (The long distance of users from the source ensured unforgeable costliness, i.e. a reliably and securely constrained supply curve, a pattern repeated with many other instances of shell and stone money).*

As with the kula ring of Melanesia, the net flow of specific transfers of *dentalia* shells followed a geographical network, in this case from a source in the distant northern Pacific Coast to sinks further south along that coast and up the Klamath River. Many of the traditional stories of the Yurok involve *dentalia*. At least one such story follows the journey of two characters along this network -- down the Pacific coast and up the Klamath River -- and how they dispense of their shells. Their *dentalia* are in demand in some [hamlets] (or the hamlets are friendly, and allow them to trade), and not in other ones (or they are hostile). Various payments do or do not occur as our characters take follow the main flow of dentalia up the Klamath River. (Kroeber p397)

Two other marine shells were often used as fungible money among the indigenous peoples of western North America, even well inland, but not among coastal peoples such as the Yurok:

> Other shells used as currency in the Western States included *olivella* and pieces of [the abalone shell] *haliotis.* The latter was in various denominations according to its size... The value of pieces of the same size varied according to the degree of their brilliance. There was a time when one single shell bought a horse in New Mexico. (Einzig p173)

Haliotis shells “were traded all down the West Coast from Alaska to Mexico” (Quiggin p299) But among the Yurok, the *haliotis* shell was common enough in the

local environment that it was only used whole, as a pendant with minor treasure value. *Olivella* was also locally abundant and used liberally as an ornament, but not as substantial money or treasure. With both fungible money and non-fungible treasure, we again see the signature economics of collectibles at work: the unique interplay between supply and demand, in particular the demand for scarce supply, which distinguishes a collectible from a normal commodity.

Hupa shaman [Source].

The main kinds of Yurok obligations or deals, and the wealth transfers that satisfied them.

Obligation	**Type of wealth**
Shaman fees	Any kind of collectible treasure or the occasional useful good of great value (e.g. canoe), almost always including some *dentalium* but usually for no more than half the value. Most common treasures used in these larger wealth transfers were woodpecker scalps and large stone blades.
Injury compensation	Similar variety and frequency of items as for shaman fees
Bridewealth Recipient priority (p401): 1. father of bride 2. brothers of bride	Similar variety and frequency of items as for shaman fees (Quiggin p296) “There was no fixed price, for that depended on the rank and wealth of the individual, and social status depended on the amount paid.” (Kroeber, 1925, pp. 21-2). Sometimes there were dowry counter-payments, e.g. if the bride’s father was particularly wealthy.

3. uncles of bride	
Divorce (p402-3) any time at a woman's choice, as long as her kin repays man must show just cause to convince her kin to repay	Repayment depended on fertility: She died early => partial repayment Ongoing infertility => partial repayment Each child she bore => smaller repayment upon divorce, death, or subsequent infertility.
Exchange	Usually *dentalia* could be used to purchase a wide variety of treasures, useful goods, fishing rights, hunting rights, incorporeal rights (e.g. rights to say prayers and cast spells), etc. at either customary or negotiated exchange rates

Dentalia, unlike treasure, was fungible and divisible. In consequence the values of individual pieces of treasure, expressed as the Yurok did in terms of their customary or most recent exchange rate into *dentalia,* could in principle have been counted, summed, and subtracted to compute a net settlement in satisfaction of two opposing obligations. In practice, the indigenous Californians lacked calculating devices for accomplishing this – they had neither any sort of abacus nor methods of algorithmic writing used in Eurasia. Because of such difficulties in computing and thus comparing the values of money and treasure, bilateral large payments (such as bridewealth and dowry in a marriage, or bilateral damages incurred in a war) that included such treasures, as they almost always did, were not net settled, but instead each side paid in full. If two men married each others' sisters, each paid the full bridewealth to the other (Quiggin p296).

Property with concrete utility was also sometimes used as part of large wealth transfers, albeit far less commonly than collectibles:

- Fishing rights
- Hunting rights
- Canoes (cross-river ferries, up-and-down-river polling-and-paddling, ocean-going paddling)
- Slaves

About five percent of the population were slaves. They "entered into this condition solely through debt, never through violence" – adult male prisoners of war were killed, with women and children returned upon settlement or adopted. The debt was almost always incurred in a dispute settlement – if the adjudged party could not pay the amount in question, whether through *dentalia* or other treasures or property, they became the slave of the adjudged victim.

Fishing sites were (and to a great extent still are) considered privately owned and transferable. Fishing rights could be loaned for a portion of the harvest. Owners of the best sites were envied "aristocrats". (Lufkin). "Prolific eddies" were defined as discrete fishing spots by custom, which generally forbade the establishment of new locations, since these would usually degrade the fishing in current locations. A fishing spot could be individually owned, but since it usually generated more food than a family could eat, the spot was more often jointly owned in fractional shares by several men, who then used the spot in rotation. The shares were inheritable and sellable as individual property. (Kroeber p405)

A Yurok man fishes for salmon with a plunge net at pame-kya'-ra-m, a "usual and accustomed" fishing site on the Klamath River, California, before 1898. [Source]

If a piece of land was less than a mile or so from rivers or coast (the main sources of the Yuroks' food) and good hunting, it was likely to be privately owned, meaning one needed the permission of the owner to hunt on it; otherwise it was common and permissionless. Deer and elk were the principle prey – smaller game were scarce or otherwise not worth the trouble. Special rights pertained to taking sea lions on the coast. The only punishable kind of trespassing was poaching, and

poachers could be shot without incurring a blood money liability. (Kroeber p406).

A case of positive claim-rights to sea-lion flippers described by Hoebel illustrates a cycle of broken-down negotiations and revenge, culminating in a property settlement that satisfied principles and kin sufficiently to terminate the vendetta. A certain M had a generally acknowledged hereditary claim to have handed over to him the flippers of all sea-lions taken on a certain 4-mile section of beach. (Apparently sea lion flippers can be made into boots that grip slippery surfaces, fishing net floats, or glue, and at least farther up the Pacific Coast flipper meat was widely considered to be great delicacy: [Source]). A certain L allegedly killed sea-lions on the beach but kept their flippers in violation of M's claim. A series of attack, claim, counter-attack, etc., including murder of L by M, eventually led to a settlement with L's next-of-kin receiving the sea lion flipper claim rights that started the dispute. (Hoebel p54-55)

Conclusion

Yurok canoe on the Trinity River, c. 1923. [Source]

The ability to transfer wealth was crucial during many events critical to the Darwinian fitness of evolving humans, especially death (inheritance), dispute settlement, and marriage. With the Yurok and their neighboring tribes, this wealth typically took the form of collectibles that lacked concrete use – either non-fungible treasure, which came in a variety of forms, or fungible money in the form of *dentalia* shells and strings of same. The use of money and treasure in some transactions (e.g. for use mitigating violence) made it available and encouraged its use in others (e.g. trade).

Collectibles involved a unique interplay of supply and demand whereby demand was based in large part on a predictable constraint in supply. A common way cultures met this constraint was by using collectibles that originated in a very distant region and percolated into the local region via a relatively constant stream of transfers (which could be long-distance trade, but could also be a series of transfers themselves as injury compensation or bridewealth). Collectibles flowed from relatively plentiful at the origin to relatively scarce in the region they are used as collectibles. For fungible and divisible collectibles such as *dentalia* shells, they worked best as money where a geographical balance was struck between sufficient scarcity for value density and sufficient abundance to allow for its divisibility and fungibility. Such a collectible could be put to best use as money in a "Goldilocks region" in between where it was overly scarce and where it was overly abundant.

References

"Yurok Culture: History"

Lufkin, Alan, editor. *California's Salmon and Steelhead: The Struggle to Restore an Imperiled Resource*, chapter 2. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1991. [Link]

E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Law of Primitive Man*, Atheneum / Harvard University Press 1954

Kroeber, A.L., *Handbook of the Indians of California*, Chapter 2, as reprinted in R.F. Heizer and M.A. Whipple eds., *The California Indians: A Sourcebook*, University of California Press 1971

Kroeber, A. L., *Handbook of the Indians of California* , Bureau Amer. Ethn. Bull., 1925, as cited in Quiggins op. cit.

Goddard,P.E., *Life and Culture of the Hupa*, The University Press, 1903. [Link]

A. Hingston Quiggin, *A Survey of Primitive Money*, Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1949

Paul Einzig, *Primtive Money, 2nd ed.*, Pergamon Press 1966.

Posted by Nick Szabo at 11:48 PM

1 comment:

Unknown said…

Hi admin,

I read your blog, Its really awesome, I have also a blog which is related with you, which is about quick cash for house.
If you want quick cash you must ignore amateur buyers because they are no good and they will end up wasting your time and energy.
the sellers try ways of finding potential buyers but this process is both complicated and very time consuming.
quick cash for house

Regards,
fahiam Mahomed

10:01 AM

Post a Comment

Newer Post Home Older Post

Subscribe to: Post Comments (Atom)

Simple theme. Powered by Blogger.